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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000416

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
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P FOR DRUSSELL
USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER
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SUBJECT: LEBANON: HIZBALLAH'S ELECTORAL PLATFORM: "RESIST
WITH YOUR VOTE"

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

¶1. (C) Under the theme of "Resist with your vote," Hizballah formally launched its electoral campaign on April 6. Hizballah MP Mohammed Raad pledged economic, judicial, and political reforms and called for fighting corruption and abolishing political sectarianism. Raad credited Hizballah's Memorandum of Understanding with Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun for its July 2006 "victory" against Israel. He further proposed a national defense strategy that takes advantage of Hizballah's military expertise. Running the same number of candidates, 13, as seats it currently holds, Hizballah's six new candidates can be described as intellectuals, a break from its previous parliamentarians' religious or military profile. Hizballah is clearly downplaying its role as a resistance against Israel and attempting to paint itself as a political organization aided by its alliance with Aoun, a prominent Christian leader. End summary and comment.

¶2. (SBU) During an April 6 press conference in Beirut's southern suburbs, Hizballah formally launched its electoral platform for the June 7 parliamentary elections under the banner of "Resist with your vote." Representing Hizballah, MP Mohammed Raad pledged economic, judicial, and political reforms. In addition to fighting corruption, he called for tax reforms, an end to the budget deficit, and the formation of a Planning Ministry to focus on sustained development. He further proposed the establishment of an independent judicial commission. Hizballah's platform also favors a "higher committee that would work for the abolition of political sectarianism, draft a modern electoral law, complete with a constitutional amendment to lower the voting age to 18 and to separate parliament from the cabinet."

¶3. (SBU) Calling the elections an "opportunity to revive Lebanon's political life," Raad stressed the party's support for a strategy of "partnership, consensus, and state-building based on the rule of law." Raad faulted UN Security Council Resolution 1559 for dividing the country and credited Hizballah's Memorandum of Understanding with Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement for strengthening unity in Lebanon, which contributed to "Lebanon's victory in the July 2006

war." He called for a national defense strategy that takes advantage of Hizballah's military expertise and capabilities.

CANDIDATES: MORE INTELLECTUALS,
LESS RELIGIOUS, MILITARY FIGURES

¶4. (C) Hizballah announced 13 candidates in the elections--the same number of seats it currently holds in the 128-member parliament. The following candidates have registered to run:

¶A. Current MPs

- Mohammed Raad, Nabatieh
- Mohammed Fneish, Tyre
- Hassan Fadlallah, Bint Jbeil
- Ali Mekdad, Baalbeck-Hermel
- Hussein al Haj Hassan, Baalbeck-Hermel
- Nawar Sahili, Baalbeck-Hermel
- Ali Ammar, Baabda
- Amine Sherri, Beirut II (Note: On April 7, Sherri withdrew his candidacy, reportedly due to Hizballah-Amel dealmaking on candidates for this Shia sect. End note.)

¶B. Newcomers

- Dr. Nawaf Moussawi, Tyre: Moussawi is Hizballah's international relations spokesman. Majoring in philosophy at Beirut University, Moussawi has a reputation as an arrogant intellectual figure. He meets regularly with those embassies that have contact with Hizballah.

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- Dr. Ali Fayad, Marjeyoun: A Shia, Fayad earned his doctorate in international relations, reportedly from Oxford. He currently serves as the director of the Islamic Research Center, Hizballah's think tank.

- Hussein Moussawi, Baalbeck-Hermel: Moussawi, a Shia, is also considered to be an intellectual.

- Walid Sukarieh, Baalbeck-Hermel: Sukarieh, a Sunni, is a retired Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) general who deserted the LAF to join sides with Druze leader Walid Jumblatt and Speaker Nabih Berri during fighting during the civil war in 1984. He is the brother of current Hizballah MP Ismail Sukarieh, who has said he would not run in these elections. Both brothers have allied themselves with the opposition March 8/Hizballah as their district in the Bekaa is predominantly Shia. (Note: A Future Party alliance would not get them seats. End note.)

- Emile Rahmeh, Baalbeck-Hermel: Chairman of the Lebanese Solidarity Party, Rahmeh is a Maronite lawyer who served as Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea's attorney when he was arrested in 1994. Rahmeh was one of only a few Maronites who remained close to former president Emile Lahoud after former PM Rafiq Hariri's assassination in 2005. Seen as an opportunistic Christian who would do better with a Hizballah alliance than with Christian LF or FPM parties

COMMENT

¶5. (C) Hizballah is currently downplaying its role as a resistance against Israel and is attempting to paint itself as a political organization. Its messages of national unity, fighting corruption, and judicial/political/economic reform are in sync with Aoun's theme of "change and reform." However, it is not seeking a larger share of parliament than it now has. At the same time, throwing its weight behind Aoun in key Christian districts demonstrates that Hizballah does indeed want the majority in parliament, but through its Christian proxy.

¶6. (C) The profile of Hizballah's candidates have changed

over time. In 1992, it tended to run religious figures for parliament and during the next two parliamentary elections, it promoted more military types. This year, there are a number of intellectuals who have not previously run, indicative of Hizballah's desire to promote itself as a legitimate, multi-confessionally allied political movement, rather than a religious or military party.

SISON